

SPEAKING AND SILENCE:  
EURIPIDES *ORESTES* 1591-2

Με. ἦ καὶ σύ, Πυλάδῃ, τοῦδε κοινωνεῖς φόνου;  
Ορ. φησὶν σιωπῶν· ἀρκέσω δ' ἐγὼ λέγων.

While seeking to reassert recently<sup>1</sup> the authenticity of the Recognition Scene in Euripides' *Electra*, I overlooked the relevance of the above passage<sup>2</sup>. And yet it fits beautifully within the framework there established of cross-references to Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in Euripidean tragedies, not least the *Orestes*. Since the two most recent commentaries on the latter play<sup>3</sup> fail to observe the cross-reference in question, the present note may perhaps contribute something more than a mere *addendum* to the aforementioned article.

The cross-reference, then, is to Aesch. *Cho.* 899-903, one of that drama's great *coups de theatre*<sup>4</sup>. Clytemnestra has just bared her breast, appealing to Orestes not to kill his own mother, and Orestes is momentarily non-plussed:

Ορ. Πυλάδῃ, τί δράσω; μητέρ' αἰδεσθῶ κτανεῖν;  
Πυ. ποῦ δαὶ τὸ λοιπὸν Λοξίου μαντεύματα  
τὰ πυθόχρηστα, πιστά τ' εὐορκώματα;  
ἅπαντας ἐχθροὺς τῶν θεῶν ἡγοῦ πλέον.  
Ορ. κρίνω σε νικᾶν, καὶ παραινεῖς μοι καλῶς.

It is well-known (notorious, indeed) that Pylades' decisive intervention here is all the more emphatic and weighty precisely because it is his only spoken contribution to the entire play (and trilogy). He has been silent hitherto and will not speak again. The situation in the *Orestes* is the very

<sup>1</sup> "CQ" 48, 1998, 389-403.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Gredley, *Greek tragedy and the "discovery" of the actor*, 'Themes in Drama' 6 (*Drama and the Actor*) (Cambridge 1984) 13f., hereafter 'Gredley', compares the two passages, but since his remarks have been overlooked by scholars other than myself (cf., for instance, n. 3 below) the point may bear repeating in a somewhat different context.

<sup>3</sup> C.W. Willink (Oxford 1986), M.L. West (London 1987).

<sup>4</sup> See for instance, A.F. Garvie in his commentary on 838-934 (p. 275): Pylades' "utterance is comparable in its effect with the sudden outburst of Cassandra at Ag. 1072. But that was preceded by her silence when we expected her to speak, whereas the audience must by now, if not from the beginning..., assume that Pylades is a κωφὸν πρόσωπον, as he is later in the *Electra* of Sophocles and of Euripides. This intervention therefore is all the more shattering. He serves as the spokesman of Apollo, and Orestes' resolution is immediately restored".

mirror-image of this. Since his initial entry at v. 729, Pylades has had much to say; but when, at the climax of the play, he reappears on the palace roof with Orestes et al. (vv. 1549ff.), he must perforce be a κωφὸν πρόσωπον, for the third actor has to be used to play Apollo as *deus ex machina* (vv. 1625ff.)<sup>5</sup>. Aeschylus, then, leads his audience to expect Pylades to be a κωφὸν πρόσωπον and surprises them with speech. Euripides presents his audience with a Pylades who has a normal speaking part and then surprises them with silence.

In the Aeschylean scene, Clytemnestra begs Orestes not to kill his own mother, but a hesitating Orestes appeals to Pylades' three line intervention. In Euripides' scene, Menelaus begs Orestes not to kill Hermione, Menelaus' daughter, and then appeals to a mute Pylades, only to be answered by an already self-steeled Orestes. I cannot believe these contrasts to be accidental. And if we look beyond vv. 1591-2 to the context of the whole Euripidean scene, we can detect a number of correspondences and contrasts with the whole equivalent scene by Aeschylus, over and above their shared status as *stichomythia*. At vv. 1554ff. Menelaus enters with news of his wife Helen's murder or rather disappearance, and calls (at 1561f.) for the palace doors to be opened: ἀνοιγέτω τις δῶμα· προσπόλοις λέγω / ὄθειν πύλας τάσδ'. At *Cho.* 875ff. the anonymous οἰκέτης had already entered with news of his master Aegisthus' murder and called (at 877ff.) for the doors of the women's quarters to be opened: ἀλλ' ἀνοίξατε / ὅπως τάχιστα καὶ γυναικείους πύλας / μοχλοῖς χαλαῶτε. When Menelaus' order is brusquely countermanded by Orestes (and, in the light of the Aeschylean verses just quoted,

<sup>5</sup> "There is clearly a theatrical delight in flaunting the unrealistic aspect of the convention and in warning the alert members of the audience that the third speaking actor is yet to appear as *deus ex machina*": D.J. Mastronarde, *Contact and Discontinuity: some conventions of speech and action on the Greek Tragic Stage* (University of Calif. Publ. 21, 1979), p. 94; who discusses Euripides' other aims here (cfr. my article p. 396 n. 37). It is likely to be relevant that Pylades' three-line intervention in the *Choephoroi* is complicated by the three-actor rule: see e.g. Garvie's commentary (Introduction p. xlix f.) and Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford 1977) pp. 350ff. If the same actor played both the οἰκέτης and Pylades, (a) "he must retire into the palace immediately after 886 (or perhaps at 889) to emerge before 899 as Pylades", which "gives the actor little time for his change of mask and costume" (Garvie as cited above); unless (b) the servant is not visible to the audience after all; or (c) a further actor is to be postulated here. So Taplin as cited above. Similarly (but more elliptically) Gredley p. 13 ("a calculated shock to his audience's perception of what was possible or, at least, likely. Aeschylus has overused (*sic*) the resources provided by three actors in a moment of radical experiment"). Whichever solution was adopted by Aeschylus, it is very tempting to see *Or.* 1591-2 as an "implicit criticism" (cfr. my article p. 401) of the dramatic technique of Euripides' predecessor. Cf. Gredley p. 14: "a riposte not to Menelaus but to Aeschylus, which Euripides had nursed for years".

note in particular v. 1571 μοχλοῖς δ' ἄραρε κληῖθρα), Menelaus cries out (v. 1573) ἔα, τί χρῆμα; Clytemnestra, on being summoned by the servant, bursts on to stage with the exclamation (v. 885) τί ἐστὶ χρῆμα. Menelaus (v. 1585) begs in vain for his wife's corpse to be returned to him so that he can bury it (ὅπως χῶσω τάφῳ). Aeschylus' Orestes grimly promises his mother that she will share the same grave (894f: τοιγὰρ ἐν ταύτῳ τάφῳ / κείῳ) as her dead would-be husband Aegisthus. Euripides' Menelaus toiled (v. 1615 πόνους πονήσας μυρίουσ) in vain (1616 ἀνωφελῆς) bringing Helen back home. Aeschylus' Clytemnestra sat at home while her husband Agamemnon toiled abroad (919 and 921 μὴ ἔλεγχε τὸν πονοῦντ' ἔσω καθημένη... τρέφει δέ γ' ἀνδρός μόχθος ἡμένας ἔσω).

In my article<sup>6</sup> I observe that vv. 1225-42 of Euripides' *Orestes* constitute a reaction against the 'vast and central Aeschylean set-piece' that is the κομμός of *Cho.* 306-478. Pylades' intervention at *Cho.* 900ff. is nothing like so vast and central, but scholars have independently been impressed by its shattering dramatic effect<sup>7</sup>, so that, quite apart from the issue of a recent re-production of the *Oresteia*<sup>8</sup>, it is likely to have stayed in the mind of Euripides and his audience. But in their relatively local and small-scale operation *Or.* 1591-2 more closely resemble the effect of their hero's exclamation at v. 1100 ὦ φίλτατ', εἰ γὰρ τοῦτο καθάνοιμ' ἰδὼν which I have termed<sup>9</sup> an 'abuse' of the Aeschylean Orestes' ἔπειτ' ἐγὼ νοσφίσας ὀλοίμων (*Cho.* 438) whereby Euripides transfers the motif of eager anticipation from the impending death of Clytemnestra to the prospect of Menelaus' discomfiture. And that is quite similar to how I would interpret the operation of vv. 1591-2 of the same play: an 'abuse' of the Aeschylean device of an appeal to Pylades. In this regard one might further cite what David Bain<sup>10</sup> has referred to as Euripides' *self-awareness* and *self-conscious*

<sup>6</sup> P. 397.

<sup>7</sup> See n. 4 above.

<sup>8</sup> See my article p. 393.

<sup>9</sup> See my article p. 397 n. 40.

<sup>10</sup> *Some reflections on the Illusion in Greek tragedy*, "BICS" 34, 1988, 12f. Note his observation that "Euripides... is in fact more self-conscious than, say, Sophocles", and his concession that "it is possible to detect theatrical awareness in Greek tragedy and particularly in Euripides *on a small scale* [my italics] in the occasional allusive references found there to the work of predecessors and rivals. Such hints are intended, I believe, for the *cognoscenti* and as such do not seriously affect the illusion. There are perhaps fewer of them in tragedy than has sometimes been made out, but total scepticism about their existence, an attitude towards which I might in earlier writings appear to have been moving, does not now seem to me to be justified". Perhaps I should have cited this semi-palinode in my article.

'*theatricality*'<sup>11</sup> which, of course, never proceeds as far as the breaking of the dramatic illusion<sup>12</sup>. This seems to me welcome confirmation of my conviction<sup>13</sup> that the issue of the *Electra's* Recognition Scene gains in illumination from being considered in the widest context<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Apart from *Or.* 1591-2 (following Gredley), he cites the likelihood that "when Euripides' chorus in his *Philoctetes* apologize for their ten-year delay in visiting the stranded hero, Euripides has in mind (as part of his audience will have had in mind) the play of... Aeschylus in which the chorus arrives without apology ten years after Philoctetes has been deposited on Lemnos" (cfr. my article p. 399) and the effect at the start of Sophocles' *Electra* discussed by me p. 398. Also Eur. *Hel.* 1056 παλαιότης γὰρ τῷ λόγῳ γ' ἔνεστί τις ("the reference, obscure to us, is partly theatrical, a rejection of a *particular* [my italics] escape-plan in a plotting scene"), which I should prefer to assimilate to the passages relegated to my article's Appendix (p. 402f.).

<sup>12</sup> Cfr. my article p. 402 n. 58.

<sup>13</sup> See my article p. 389.

<sup>14</sup> It is certainly a pleasure to be able to emphasise that (see esp. nn. 10-11 above) the gap between Professor Bain and myself is not as wide as may have at first seemed from my article.